

## The Bush is Always Watching

If you read my last story, you'll know I spoke about how often we dismiss something as a rock or a log, only to realise later it was something far more exciting. Well, this story is very much a continuation of that same lesson.

On a previous trip to the Kruger, Luca, my parents, and I were driving around in the Malelane area during golden hour. That time of day when the light drips like honey across the bushveld, when even the dry branches seem to glow, and when the heat has softened just enough for you to breathe a little easier. The bush was quiet, almost too quiet, and the only soundtrack was the hot breeze whispering through the open windows of the car. It was one of those slow drives where you're not expecting much, but you're content just being there.

Then, as it so often happens, my mom broke the silence.

"Wait, stop, go back," she said, her eyes narrowed on something beside the road.

Dad reversed. I leaned forward, scanning the grass. There, standing awkwardly in the green glow, was a bird. "That's a weird-looking bird," Mom muttered. And it was - well, at least until we realised it wasn't anything unusual at all. Just a Korhaan. A perfectly ordinary Korhaan standing in a rather comical position, making us all chuckle at how easily we'd been fooled.

Now, a normal family might have shrugged and driven on. But we didn't. Instead, we switched off the engine and sat there, letting the stillness of the bush sink in, admiring this ordinary bird as if it were extraordinary. Because sometimes that's exactly what you need to do - appreciate what's in front of you, no matter how "common" it may be.

And then, the bush rewarded us.

Just behind the Korhaan, half-hidden in the lush midsummer grass, we noticed movement. A Steenbok. At first it looked like just another patch of brown against green, but there it was, lying down comfortably, as if it had been watching us all along. It wasn't skittish, it wasn't in a hurry, it was just relaxing in the fading warmth of the day. There was something incredibly calming about that sight. The Korhaan strutting in its odd way, the Steenbok reclining like royalty in the grass, and us, simply being still enough to notice them.

Minutes passed, the sky deepened, and we might have left it at that. But once again, Mom's sharp eyes caught something more.

"Hang on," she whispered, her voice low now. "Is that... a leopard?"

I rolled my eyes, thinking she was probably seeing another "log leopard" or "rock lion," as we so often joke. But Dad reversed the car a little more, and sure enough, there it was. A leopard.

Perched on a termite mound, golden coat blending almost perfectly with the late afternoon light, the leopard was sitting quietly, staring straight at us. Or rather, it was staring straight through us. Its tail flicked lazily, its eyes unblinking. And in that surreal moment, it hit us all at once, we hadn't been the ones watching. We had been watched.

Think about it. For all that time we'd sat admiring a Korhaan, then spotting the Steenbok, the leopard had been there. Patient. Hidden. Observing. We thought we were taking in the bush, but really, the bush had been taking in us.

That realisation sent a shiver down my spine, not out of fear but out of awe. Because that's the thing about the wild - it's layered. What you see at first glance is rarely all there is. You peel it back, you pause, you look closer, and suddenly there's more. Always more.

We eventually pulled away, our voices a mixture of laughter and disbelief. "Only us," Luca said, shaking his head. "Only we could sit staring at a Korhaan for twenty minutes, and end up with a leopard sighting."

But as funny as it was, there was a deeper reminder tucked in there. How much do we miss when we rush? How many moments do we skim over because we think we've already seen it all? The bush is full of secrets. Sometimes those secrets are in plain sight. Sometimes they're crouched low in the grass, waiting for you to notice. And sometimes they're on a termite mound, watching you with those liquid golden eyes while you're busy admiring a "weird-looking bird."

So the next time you're out in the wild, remember this. You're never truly alone out there. Every rustle in the grass, every shadow in the trees, every glint of movement in the corner of your eye could be something more. You may think you're the one doing the watching, but chances are, the bush is watching you right back.

And honestly, I wouldn't have it any other way.